

Floods and floodlets have taken over the Shortgrass scene. Not even the moon mission could capture the people's interest lately. Hombres who could barely get out to the ranch in their pickups couldn't be expected to notice moon traveling. So many vehicles have been mired in the mud that manufacturers of clutch plates are considering opening a branch plant in the area; many an overlying smell of burned rubber hangs in the valleys. Lots of old boys who thought they couldn't walk to the barber shop have come trailing in afoot from the mudholes.

My neighbor on the south has been taking care of the nocturnal cloud watching. He's been going to the ranch after midnight to run the rain gauges so by the time the rest of us arrive at the coffee house, he's had a complete rundown on the rain patterns. Professional weathermen have been hours behind his readings. He's outscopied the newspaper so many times, their reporters aren't considered in the running.

For years a truck driver has been bringing us the weather news. Every time it rained, this truck wrangler would come in the cafe and say, "Well, boys, I turned my windshield wipers on about 60 miles from so-and-so place and didn't shut them off until I stopped here in front."

Of course everybody would perk up at this news. The ranchers present would start figuring how many old ewes or old cows their particular area would need to restock, and silently projecting their figures into the possibility that they personally might share in that restocking program.

Shortgrassers, as you may already know, are great hands to help each other go back into business. In fact, not too long ago, an obliging rancher down east of Angelo got so willing to put me back in the cow business that it looks like my great grandchildren will make the last interest payment on the favor.

Under any terms, you can't beat our eastern neighbors for doing good turns. If they'd been any nicer about those old cows, they would have niced me into corner that'd make a Mississippi river sandbar look like a granite shoal. I'm just thankful I got away before they accommodated me out of the clothes that I had on.

State news services have been relieving the truck driver and my neighbors of flood news this week. Their reports, however have been a bit undependable. Two or three times, they've had 600 families homeless in Mertzon. The nearest the town ever came to being that big was on the occasion of the free rodeo we had back in the '30s on the Fourth of July. The only way we could have 600 families homeless would be to borrow about 400 families from some of our neighboring towns.

I imagine the reason the reporters thought that Mertzonites were homeless was because everybody had been staying down on the creek, watching it run. For awhile it did look like 600 families lining the river bank. People who don't see running water more than once or twice in their lifetime are attracted to such sights. I guess the city scribes didn't know that.

Clear water is seeping down the hillsides. Autumn is going to be a glorious, grass-blessed season. People who aren't happy now might as well move to another country. We'll never have a better August than this one.